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Moslem Cleric Saw Waite After Capture

The archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, has been communicating by letter with a prominent Shiite Moslem clergyman since pro-Iranian terrorists kidnaped Terry Waite, the Anglican Church envoy who is negotiating for the release of hostages.

The Moslem cleric, Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, acknowledged in handwritten messages that he has seen Waite since he was "detained" on Jan. 20 in West Beirut, according to our sources. Fadlallah and the archbishop have been writing to each other about the fate of Runcie's envoy.

Waite was credited with a major role in the release of three American hostages, and had returned to Beirut for his fifth negotiating mission. His objective was to win release of Associated Press correspondent Terry Anderson and Thomas Sutherland, dean of agriculture at the American University of Beirut.

Despite his long experience, Waite dropped his guard on the night of Jan. 20. He had met twice with members of the Islamic Jihad, the pro-Iranian kidnapers, and was to meet them again that night.

But at their request, Waite left behind his bodyguards from the Druze militia. And the Lebanese Shiite who was to have accompanied him, former health minister Adnan Mrowe, couldn't make it.

According to our sources, Mrowe was summoned to the hospital for an emergency. He begged Waite to stay with him, but Waite was eager to go to the meeting with the terrorists. As he had done before, Waite left a note stating that if he were taken

hostage there should be no negotiations undertaken for his release.

When it became apparent that Waite was indeed a hostage, Runcie began writing officials in Lebanon, Syria and Iran for help in freeing his emissary. He got a written response from Fadlallah, who had met with Waite only four days before the envoy's abduction.

Who is Fadlallah? He is the highest-ranking Shiite religious figure in Lebanon and the spiritual leader of Hezbollah (Party of God). U.S. intelligence reports blame Hezbollah for many bombings that have taken scores of American lives and say the group has been active in American hostage-taking.

Fadlallah's admission to the archbishop that he has seen Waite since the abduction confirms that Waite is being held by pro-Iranian Shiites. Fadlallah could be the key to Waite's release.

Though not Iranian, Fadlallah is considered Tehran's man in Lebanon. He has a large portrait of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in his house and has been a guest in Tehran of the Khomeini regime.

Fadlallah is widely believed to have played a significant role in the October 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks at the Beirut airport, which killed 241 servicemen.

U.S. intelligence also places Fadlallah at a crucial planning session in Damascus three days before, and concludes that he is close to Hussein Mussavi, Hezbollah's chief terrorist in Lebanon. Some intelligence sources believe that Fadlallah is Mussavi's boss. Fadlallah has repeatedly denied any part in bombings or kidnappings.